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Identity politics: Exploring Georgian foreign policy behavior

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the extent to which Georgia's pro-Western foreign policy orientation stems from ideas and identity rather than from materialist and systemic factors alone. Finding such narrow approaches insufficient for explaining small state behavior, and drawing on liberal and constructivist approaches to international relations theory, the article argues that Georgia's foreign policy orientation has a strong basis in the widespread ideological perception amongst the local political elite that Georgia "belongs" in the West. Based on this theoretical framework, this paper provides a historical overview of Georgia's foreign policy, tracing the evolution of Georgia's identity from seeing itself as "Christian" in contrast to its Islamic neighbors, to identifying as European in contrast to a modern, Russian "other". As Georgia attempts to construct a collective international identity, the devotion to the idea of Euro-Atlantic integration as a "sacred destiny" amongst the country's elite has significant foreign policy implications. This article overviews the current challenges and dilemmas of self-identification and investigates the roles that national identity and the prevailing "European" identity play in Georgia's quest for "desovietization".

1. Introduction

The idea that ideology is a factor in foreign policy is nothing new. Indeed, it has been said "that ideology has played an important part in modern international relations is generally taken for granted" (Fawn, 2006, p.7). There are few places where this is more true than in the relatively new states of the former Soviet Union. These states' propensity to internal crisis and ideological flux combined with the ongoing process of nation and state-building, "have led to a powerful role of ideas, identity and symbols" (Jones, 2004, p. 85) in this region. So it is therefore the case that structural and material theories of international relations often prove insufficient for explaining small states' foreign policy behavior. Embracing the idea that "foreign policy expresses not only what one wants, but also what one is" (Fuller, 2007, p. 93), this article discusses Georgia's foreign policy in the light of the politics of ideas and identity.

Due to its long-term historical experience and common cultural practices with multiple states and regions, Georgia could potentially identify itself with a range of regions. These include the post-Soviet space, the Caucasus or even the Middle East. Georgia could equally have simply avoided selecting a sole vector. However, disregarding all of these options, Georgia focused on its European identity, which became a major cultural focus of the political discourse (Jones, 2004) that gradually emerged throughout the country's troublesome history and constant struggle for survival amidst various empires. European identity is also

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the ticket to Euro-Atlantic integration, which has been the country's foreign policy priority for almost two decades now.

In this context, the paper examines Georgia's foreign policy through the prism of ideas and identity as major drives of its orientation. It also aims to explore the mechanisms through which ideas and identity find influence on foreign policy decision-making and behavior. Referring to concepts such as the liberal idea of 'social order' and the constructivist approach to identity, this paper argues that a state's foreign policy preferences can be traced to how the society in question defines itself in relation to others. This identity is in turn defined in relation to social orders within states. Therefore, states tend to define external allies and enemies based on the perceived compatibility of their social orders.

The paper[1] overviews theoretical propositions on the role of identity in foreign policy and suggests an overarching framework. By applying existing theoretical approaches, this inquiry provides a historical review of Georgia's identity formation and the dominant factors in its construction. Consequently, it analyses the origins of Georgia's "European" identity, which prevails in Georgian foreign policy and test the efficacy of an identity-based approach vis-à-vis alternative explanations, thus demonstrating the leading role of identity in foreign policy orientation.

2. Theoretical framework and methodology

The article places itself within a literature that refers to factors such as social order and ideas in the analysis of foreign policy choices by small states. For this purpose, this inquiry explores aspects of liberal theory (Moravcsik, 1997; Owen, 2011; Skidmore, 1997a, 1997b) that trace foreign policy preferences to the character of a state's underlying social orders and constructivism with its notion of ideas and identity. Both of these approaches often refer to the shortcomings of materialist theories, particularly in the case of explaining the foreign policy alignment of small states.

Neorealist approaches largely fall into the latter category. In the case of weak states, balance of power theory suggests that they will either exhibit balancing behavior against the most powerful or join with the powerful state – bandwagoning (Jervis & Snyder, 1991; Kaufman, 1992; Labs, 1992; Walt, 1987). Stephen Walt's (1987) revision of the realist theory suggests that states balance not against the most powerful, but against the most threatening and that threat perceptions are impacted by geographic proximity, offensive power and aggressive intentions. However, when applied to the post-Soviet states, structural realism finds little room for explaining some of the anomalies of both bandwagoning and balancing (Miller, 2006; Wohlforth, 2004). Similarly, this approach fails to explain why Georgia maintained its pro-Western foreign policy orientation after the 2008 war with Russia when it became clear that the West was not willing to play a balancing role (Gvalia, Siroky, Lebanidze, & Iashvili, 2013). The logical neorealist response to this situation would be to bandwagon with Russia but this did not occur. Moreover, even though in Walt's theory, purpose is considered along with power, Walt still does not offer a compelling explanation as to why a state can form antagonistic intentions towards other states (Skidmore, 1997b, p. 232). Economic dependence theory also fails to explain the Georgian case as Georgia further distanced itself from Russia after the imposition of an economic embargo in 2006 despite its high economic dependence on its northern neighbor.

This paper argues that we need to look beyond systemic factors to explain cases like this and look at the more fundamental sources of foreign policy preferences. This is where ideas in relation to state social orders start to matter. A brief literature review reveals that the importance of ideology and identity in foreign policy orientation has been emphasized by many in the past.

For Moravcsik (1997), it is the configuration of state preferences that matters most in world politics rather than the configuration of capabilities as claimed by realism: "societal ideas, interests and institutions influence state behavior by shaping state preferences that is the fundamental social purposes underlying the strategic calculations of governments". In the same vein, whilst discussing various cases of regime promotion in the world, Owen (2011) accords a major role to ideologies behind state intentions. Rejecting approaches that merely concentrate on material interests, he argues that state leaders promote regimes based on the interests of specific ideologies thus equating regime promotion to "ideological polarization". David Skidmore (1997a) uses the idea of social orders to analyze foreign policy: "state behavior is a function of interests and purposes generated by the broader social orders in which states are embedded" (p. 3). Skidmore, rejects the assumption that state preferences are solely conditioned by inter-state competition but rather "socially constructed in a fluid environment" (p. 4). This makes the international system a field of competing social orders rather than states. Interests and power are structured in the social order by the following components: "political regimes (institutions), dominant ideological systems (ideas) and structures of economic production and distribution (socio-economic interests)" (p. 4). In foreign policy, the degree of compatibility between social orders is what defines enmity and friendship between states. Skidmore proposes that "conflict stems first and foremost from qualitative differences in the purposes of such actors and in their visions of the preferred domestic and international order" (1997b, p. 181).

Even though ideational liberalism stresses the importance of ideas in terms of state conflict and cooperation, it does not trace their origins (Moravcsik, 1997). This is where constructivism can further enrich our analysis of the effect of identity-based preferences on foreign policy, more specifically through the idea of the self/other nexus. Based on the proposition that "social threats are constructed, not natural" (Wendt, 1999, p. 405), identity and perceived

[1] This work was supported by Academic Swiss Caucasus Net (ASCN) within the project "Role of Identity, Norms and Beliefs in Foreign Policy of Armenia and Georgia". The contents of this paper do not necessarily reflect the views of ASCN.

interests are believed to shape the perceptions of elites and populations, which are in turn reflected in foreign policy orientation and behavior. What a state perceives as its interests depends "on a particular construction of self-identity in relation to the conceived identity of others" (Jepperson, Wendt, & Katzenstein, 1996, p. 60). In a similar vein, Johnston (1995) argues that national identity is relevant to foreign policy because it is constructed in the process of identifying the "self" in contrast to the "other". Furthermore, Goldstein and Keohane (1993) exploring the impact of ideas and beliefs on foreign policy, claimed that "actions taken by human beings depend on the substantive quality of available ideas, since such ideas help to clarify principles and conceptions of causal relationships and to coordinate individual behavior" (p. 5). This does not imply that explanations based on ideas and material interests cannot coexist but the opposite, that they are compatible in the sense that "material interests matter but ideas determine how they matter" (Gvalia et al., 2013, p. 109). Similarly, Fawn sees the link between security and identity suggesting that "search for national identity coincides with the search for security" (2006, p. 36).

Reconciling the social order approach with the ideas that stem from identity as self/other nexus, is capable of suggesting that other is defined based on the perceived incompatibility between social orders. On the other hand, identification of the self and a larger entity of belonging stems from perceived compatible social orders. Ideas then can influence policy and foreign policy among them in several ways including how decision-makers frame and describe a situation, ideas structure policy decision-making process and influence the way results are interpreted (Tannenwald, 2005, p. 17). Based on the above-mentioned frame, we suggest that ideas on the self, other, perceived threat from the other and proposed relations based on the perceived compatibility of social orders influence foreign policy choices.

In line with Nina Tannenwald's (2005) work, this article is grounded in "soft positivism" whilst at the same time taking account of constructivist approaches. To demonstrate that ideas matter in the case of Georgia, this inquiry refers to measures of continuity, which explain persistent factors in the way the country interacts with other states. Consistency of a stated goal, foreign policy orientation, behavior or ideology in the context of congruence with public opinion can suggest such continuity. This is undertaken in contrast to alternative explanations. Considering the lack of awareness of the Georgian population about European institutions (Muller, 2011), identity construction is considered to be a top-down project, which is the case in the majority of cases where states transition towards a different model has presence (Lane, 2011). Correspondingly, in our research, the main focus falls on political elites[2] and their ideas and identity. Georgian foreign policy is also primarily considered to be elite-driven and elites are assumed to be "more important and instrumental in defining foreign policy goals and priorities compared to the general public" (Gvalia et al., 2013, p. 31).

The paper also intends to explore the rationale through which ideas and identity find inroads into foreign policy behavior. Based on the theoretical framework, it is argued that it is ideas about the extent of social (in) compatibility that influence how political leaderships identify their "self" and "other" and thus define allies and enemies. The article traces back the historical development of Georgia's "Europeanness", and uses the content analysis method to analyze foreign policy documents of the last two governments, speeches of their representatives. Drawing upon original 20 in-depth interviews that were conducted with major foreign policy decision-makers from the last two governments of Georgia led by the United National Movement (UNM) and the Georgian Dream (GD) coalition it also provides elite perceptions regarding the same issue (see the Appendix for the respondents' profiles).

3. Ideas and identity as factors of state behavior and emergence of "Europeanness"

Throughout many centuries of occupation and division, as Georgia played a role of a buffer state between different empires and invaders (Turmanidze, 2009), many aspects of the country's foreign policy behavior or aspired orientation reflected its evolving identity. Before Christianity, the Kingdom of Kartli-Iberia, located in what is now Georgia, was subject to the influences of both the ancient Greeks to the west and the Persians to the East.[3] During the first millennium, the Byzantine and Persian empires divided Georgia between themselves; however, Georgia's establishment as a Christian state brought it closer to Byzantium in terms of culture. As the Ottoman Empire captured Constantinople in 1453 and sealed the Black Sea, Georgia was cut off from Europe and the Christian world. Consequently, Georgia's trade ties with the West were severed resulting in political and economic decline. The country turned into a battleground for two rival powers – Safavid Persia and the Ottoman Empire.[4] Georgia found itself exclusively enveloped by Islamic powers.

Being an object of Muslim empires and dynasties, religion became the major marker of Georgian identity. Georgia was "an outpost of Western Christendom in an Islamic world", therefore the Georgian as a "Christian, European and warrior-martyr" was defined vis-à-vis the Muslim "other" (Jones, 2004, p. 91). Under the constraint of the Persian and Ottoman empires, Georgia often looked for an ally in Christian Europe. Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani's

[2] We use Gaetano Mosca's (1939) definition of political class here, who refers to it as "the relatively small group of activists that is highly aware and active in politics, and from whom the national leadership is largely drawn".

[3] For detailed account see: Haas, C. (2014). "Geopolitics and Georgian Identity in Late Antiquity: The Dangerous World of Vakhtang Gorgasali" in Georgian Christian Thought and Its Cultural Context. (Ed) Nutsubidze, T.,Horn, C. B, Lourié, B. Koninklijke Brill publishing.

[4] Details see: Metreveli, R. (1998). Essays on the history of Georgian diplomacy. Tbilisi State University.K'art'ulisaxelmcip'o da saxalxodiplomatiisistoriissamec'niero- Kvlevit'ic'entri.T'bilisiuniversitetis gamomc'emloba.

diplomatic mission to France was such a case. Considering France as the strongest country in Europe, the Georgian king, Vakhtang IV, seeking a potential ally and protector sent his envoy Orbeliani to appeal for assistance. Despite his meetings with several leaders such as Ludwig XIV, Pope Clement XI and Louis XIV, who even promised some help, his journey was largely unsuccessful.[5]

Meanwhile, Russia emerged as a considerable power in the region. Hoping that its Christian neighbor would protect Orthodox Georgia from Muslim domination, Georgian leaders appealed to Russia.[6] However, Russia's protection turned out to mean the loss of Georgia's political independence after the death of the last east Georgian king, Giorgi XII, as the Kingdom of Kartl-Kakheti was incorporated in the Russian Empire without any autonomy. However, despite Russia's autocratic tradition, for Georgia it remained a channel to Western ideas (albeit in a distorted way) until the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 (Nodia, 2010, p. 91).

The way to the West was through Russia and the ideas of European thinkers were introduced to Georgia via education in Russian centers of learning (Suny, 1994, p. 123). It was in fact the Russian-educated young generation of Georgians *Tergdaleulni*, who spurred the concept of Georgian nationalism in 1860s after bringing European ideas back home (Nodia, 2010, p. 86). However, Georgia's self-identification as western and the notion of a "return to Europe" emerged in the beginning of the 20th century with the *Tsiperkhantselni*, who were educated in Western Europe (Brisku, 2009, p. 76). After the Bolshevik Revolution, Russia lost its image as a source of enlightenment among the Georgian social democratic leadership, who no longer saw Russia as part of Europe and rather sought integration into European political structures (Jones, 2004, p. 92). At this time Georgia sought direct links with Europe and chose social democracy and western-type of development (Nodia, 2010, p. 94). This is when Russia began to be seen as the "other" vis-à-vis belonging to Europe, which was further reinforced by Georgia's forceful integration into the Soviet Union,[7] which was perceived as a barrier isolating it from its historical destiny. In this context Europe was perceived as "a pristine and symbolic antithesis to communism's oriental backwardness". This time instead of self-identification as Christian vis-à-vis the Muslim world, Georgia perceived itself as European by rejecting communism (Jones, 2004, p. 88).

4. Georgia's foreign policy trajectory after independence

After its declaration of independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia embraced western values of liberal democracy. However, with an inherited political culture lacking in strong democratic tradition, an inexperienced foreign policy elite, scarce financial resources, and poorly defined competing social forces, initially Georgia was unable to develop a viable foreign and security policy towards the West. The first president Zviad Gamsakhurdia struggled to develop meaningful diplomatic ties as important international actors remained reluctant to recognize the country's independence. President George H. W. Bush's speech in August 1991 urging non-Russian Soviet republics to accept Gorbachev's proposed union treaty (Matlock, 2005) is one such example. However, the West was expected to support the principles of international law and self-determination (Fawn, 2006) and was perceived as "an embodiment of fairness [which] by definition was obliged to support just cases" (Nodia, 1998, p. 20). But Gamsakhurdia failed to craft a viable foreign and security policy and pursued a rather utopian pan-Caucasian project at the expense of Georgia's silenced European identity (Jones, 2004, p. 88).

Foreign policy choices were restricted by internal conflicts in the country. The next leader, Eduard Shevardnadze, despite initial rejection of the idea, was forced to concede influence to Russia through membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 1993 (Rondeli, 2001). Shevardnadze's decision was influenced by his need to strengthen his position in the struggle for power against warlords and the ousted president as well as in ongoing territorial conflicts (Baev, 1997).

However, once the situation was normalized in the country, Georgia started looking towards the west again. The second half of the 1990s saw the goal of western integration become more prominent in Georgian political discourse. This pro-Western ideology was most strongly seen in the younger generation of reformists in the ruling party – the Citizen's Union of Georgia (Beacháin & Coene, 2014, p. 929). This process occurred parallel to the "othering" of Russia which failed to contribute to conflict resolution despite Georgia's concessions. The development of relations with European structures including Georgia's admission to the Council of Europe in 1999 were portrayed as important steps on the way "back to Europe" (Beacháin & Coene, 2014, p. 929). This state of affairs was best encapsulated by parliamentary chairman Zurab Zhvania's words: "I am Georgian, therefore I am European". In 1994, Georgia joined NATO's Partnership for Peace Programe (PfP) and in 1999 the PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP). A Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) was signed between Georgia and the European Union, which went into force in 1999. The goals of integration were reflected in official documents as well. For instance, the document on "Basic Principles of the Sustainability of Social Life, the Strengthening of State Sovereignty and Security and Restoration of Territorial Integrity of Georgia" openly states Georgia's European orientation and the need to integrate into its structures (Jones, 2004, p. 98). In the document from 2000, Georgia's foreign policy goal is stated

[5] See more: Silogava, V, Shengelia, K. (2007) History of Georgia: From the Ancient Times Through the "Rose Revolution". Caucasus University Publishing House.

[6] See: Avalov, Z. (1906) Prisoedinenie Gruzii k Rossii, Montvid, S.-Peterburg. (Repr. New York: Chalidze Publications, 1981).

[7] The Democratic Republic of Georgia, (1918–1921), was the first modern establishment of a Republic of Georgia. Proclaimed on May 26, 1918, on the break-up of the Transcaucasian Federation, it was led by the Social Democratic Menshevik party. Facing permanent internal and external problems, the young state was unable to withstand the invasion by the Russian SFSR Red Armies, and collapsed between February and March 1921 to become a Soviet republic. On this account see: Leon Trotsky, Between Red and White. Social Democracy and wars of Intervention. 1922. Available at: http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1922/red-white/index.htm.

as “to achieve full integration into European political, economic, and security structures, thus fulfilling the historical aspiration of the Georgian nation to participate fully in the European community…” (Georgia and the World: A Vision and Strategy for the Future, 2000).

Consequently, balancing Russian power, seen as primary for Georgia's security, has constituted a major goal of Georgia's foreign policy since 1994. For Georgia, aligning with the western powers and membership in their structures such as NATO and EU represent a means of achieving security, but this goal also arises from the Georgian social order. Georgian foreign policy in the 1990s reflected both the country's values and the country's aspiration towards establishing a western model of governance. Therefore, despite the fact that Georgia's foreign policy remained mainly reactive and hesitant during the 1990s (Jones, 2004), the general orientation of Georgian foreign policy remained constant, not only during the period since 1991 (Jones, 2004), but also during the period of the first independent Georgian republic in 1918–21 (Nodia, 2010). Western identity is key to this (Jones, 2004; Nodia, 2010) implying that the West is a model for Georgia's development as a democracy as well as being the country's major ally and protector (Nodia, 2010, p. 94). However, despite this western identity, at least in the first half of the 1990s, considering the reactive character of foreign policy, it was only after the Rose Revolution that Georgia's foreign policy orientation became starkly defined in terms of joining the West and this was rationalized by cultural affiliation.

After the Rose Revolution in November 2003, European integration gained new momentum as Georgia reclaimed its place in Europe and correspondingly set NATO and EU membership as major foreign policy goals. The Rose Revolution was interpreted as “the masses upholding Georgia's national dignity and democratic values” that implied reentry into Europe (Beacháin & Coene, 2014, p. 930). Indeed, in some aspects of political and economic life as well as democratization, Georgia significantly outbid most of its post-Soviet counterparts, particularly in terms of decreasing corruption as well as becoming one of the fastest growing economies in Souteastern Europe (Cornell, 2007; Fairbanks, 2004; Jawad, 2006; Mitchell, 2004, 2006; Wheatley, 2006).

Echoing the emerging political changes, Euro-Atlantic integration was set out as the main foreign policy priority (Foreign Policy Strategy 2006–2009; National Security Concept, 2005; 2011). The National Security Concept of Georgia, the basic document that explains Georgia's fundamental national values and interests which was adopted by parliament in July 2005, described Georgia as “an integral part of the European political, economic and cultural area, whose fundamental national values are rooted in European values and traditions [and which] aspires to achieve full integration into Europe's political, economic and security systems … and to return to its European tradition and remain an integral part of Europe” (National Security Concept, 2005). The Concept underlines the aspiration of the people of Georgia to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), and to contribute to the security of the Black Sea region as a constituent part of the Euro-Atlantic security system. Even though some inconsistencies accompanied the practical process of “Europeanization” such as the adoption of the “Singapore model” for Georgia's economic development, which to some extent contradicted the European model (De Waal, 2011) or some shortcomings in implementing EU requirements, overall, Georgia's foreign policy remained unshakably pro-Western. This was undertaken in parallel to the process of “othering” Russia. Relations with Russia further deteriorated with the imposition by Moscow of an economic embargo in 2006, the deportation of Georgian migrants from Russia and an energy blockade. This process culminated in the August War of 2008 between the two countries and Russia's recognition of the independence of Georgia's two breakaway regions. An image of Russia was constructed in which it is an evil power for which Georgia's existence as a sovereign state is inherently unacceptable. Consequently, Russian influence in Georgia was considered to be an important obstacle to the European integration of the country especially considering the fact that the Russian political and military class largely rejected Georgia's state-building project as contradictory to Russia's national interests.

Georgia went through a major change after the 2012 parliamentary and 2013 presidential elections. The Georgian Dream coalition replaced the Saakashvili-led United National Movement and presented its slightly different vision of foreign policy. The new government pursued a policy of “normalization” with Russia, whilst maintaining the main target of Euro-Atlantic integration. Integration into the EU and NATO remained foreign policy priorities (Civil.ge, 2013, February 11). Relations with the EU were further advanced by the signing of an Association Agreement on June 27 2014 that includes creating a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). The same rhetoric of ‘belonging to Europe’ continued to feature in official discourse. Though the agreement doesn't guarantee Georgia's EU membership in foreseeable future, it recognized the ambition and aspirations of Georgian people to one day become a member of the European family (European Commission, 2014, May 11). As Prime Minister of Georgia Irakli Garibashvili stated at the signing ceremony of the Association Agreement: “today Georgia is given a historic chance to return to its natural environment, Europe, its political, economic, social and cultural space” (Civil.ge, 2014, June 27). President Giorgi Margvelashvili also made similar claims: “as an individual, a Georgian national is European in terms of self-awareness and an integral part of Western civilization by nature” (The President of Georgia, 2013). However, it should also be noted that the Georgian Dream coalition is a rather eclectic one. Consisting a range of different politicians including a former football star and officials from the government of former president Shevardnadze, it lacks ideological unity. Therefore, even though the major leaders share pro-western aspirations, it is difficult to generalize for the whole coalition.

Overall, since the second half of the 1990s, Georgia's pro-western foreign policy has remained largely unchanged which is rather unexplainable for material approaches. As Georgian scholar Alexander Rondeli (2001) states “[Georgian] attempts to integrate their country into European structures is often seen as strategic idealism, which goes against all geopolitical arguments and even

common sense" (p. 195). In a similar vein, Nodia (2010) argues that Georgia could have easily chosen a different course, therefore Georgia's choices are not "based on some material necessity or strict logic" (p. 95). Despite the pressure from Russia both in security and economic terms, including the 2008 August War and the 2006 economic embargo, Georgia did not resort to the systemic pressure to bandwagon with Russia but instead steadily continued its pro-western policy (Gvalia et al., 2013).

There are several alternative explanations that consider material rather than ideational factors for Georgia's western orientation. These include the economic benefits of western integration, to balance Russia in the region (Jones, 2004, p. 102), elite legitimacy and the search for an external patron (Beacháin & Coene, 2014). These factors do objectively exist, but purely material explanations fail to explain the full picture. The theoretical framework does not exclude the coexistence of both ideational and interest-based reasoning for foreign policy decisions. Therefore, while it is true that elites may see the West as a better source of potential economic benefits or legitimacy than Russia, this perception may stem from their identity and from their view of the West as a source of the freedom and democracy on which their legitimacy depends. Moreover, the argument that Georgia is attracted to the West as a balance against Russia should be tempered by consideration of the extent to which the West has been willing to act as such a balance. Despite significant economic support since the 1990s and increasing involvement in terms of training and expertise sharing, military assistance from the West has been minimal. Furthermore, Georgian membership of NATO (Kakachia, 2013b) and the EU is quite a long-term perspective and may not be easily attainable in the near future.

So ideas and identity can go some way to explaining why Georgia defined the West as part of its "self", whilst "othering" Russia. This is conditioned by how the West's social order and Western institutional, ideological and economic structures are perceived by political elites in Georgia in relation to their own identity. As discussed above, from the very beginning the political development of Georgia was framed in a way that equated it to western integration.

5. Georgia-West ties: a compatibility of social orders

There are several ways in which Georgian political elites justify their country's pro-western orientation that arise from the perceived complementary nature of their social orders. These attitudes stem from the perception held by Georgian elites of the level of compatibility of their country's social order with that perceived to exist in the West or Russia.

This idea implies that Georgia's foreign policy choice is intrinsically linked to its aspirations of developing a western state with liberal democracy, but also with its historical context and cultural values. Georgia's self-perception as a country distinguished within the region by its aspirations for freedom and democracy was particularly spurred by the Rose Revolution in November 2003, after which Georgia was hailed as a "beacon of liberty" (The Guardian, 2005, May 10). In his inauguration speech then President Saakashvili stated:

> [The European] flag is Georgia's flag as well, as far as it embodies our civilization, our culture, the essence of our history and perspective, and our vision for the future of Georgia…Georgia is not just a European country, but one of the most ancient European countries…our steady course is towards European integration. It is time Europe finally saw and valued Georgia and took steps toward us (Civil.ge, 2004, January 25).

A review of statements by other Georgian politicians interviewed for this article reveals similar sentiments. Often, respondents referred to Georgia's historical relations with Europe, especially ancient Greece, to bolster Georgia's Western identity: "Georgians are their [the ancient Greeks'] direct descendants, about a quarter of Greek myths actually refer to Georgia" (MP, GD, personal communication, July 22, 2014). Christianity is also commonly cited as a basis of Georgia's commonality with European civilization. So it is said that Georgia's "constant drive towards the European, Christian world" (Official from PM's office, GD, personal communication, July 30, 2014), means that until the 15th century, Georgia was part of a common European cultural space through its relations with the Byzantine Empire (Official from NSC, UNM; Official from MFA, UNM; Official from MFA, GD; Official from PM's Office, GD, personal communications). However, the narrative continues, that the country was forcibly disconnected from its natural cultural space after the Turks conquered Constantinople. Georgia's European aspirations were then unfulfilled until Georgia regained its independence in 1918–21 and selected the western model of development (Official from MFA, UNM, July 1, 2014). But these relations are not described as mere historical experience, but as an inherent part of the formation of Georgia's identity and values. These politicians underline two major "Georgian values" that unite them with democratic western civilization. These are individualism (Official from MFA, UNM, personal communication, 5 September, 2014) and a love of freedom (MP; GD; Official from NSC, GD; Official from Ministry of Euro-Atlantic Integration, GD; Official from Ministry of Reconciliation and Civic Equality, GD, personal communications):"our values, our aspirations, our inherent position is absolutely European as we, Georgians, love freedom, we cannot even breathe without freedom" (Official from Ministry of Euro-Atlantic Integration, GD, personal communication, September 2, 2014). Correspondingly, the current development of closer relations with the West is therefore characterized as a "return to Europe": "Georgia is returning to the civilization to which it belongs" (Official from MFA, UNM, personal communication, September 5, 2014).

With these aspirations and statements of identity, Georgian political leaders associate themselves with a region enjoying prosperity and development (the West) rather than with peripheral areas such as the post-Soviet space. It is because of this that many Georgians believe that the country's economic and security needs can only be achieved through cooperation with the West, which is the "most attractive political-economic model in the world" (Diplomat from Georgian Mission to EU, UNM, personal communication, 30 June, 2014). It is also often argued that Georgian and Western societies share common ideas and

that Georgia's democratic development is only possible through pro-western foreign policy: "integration into this organization (NATO) implies more protection, but also more integration with the countries whose values include freedom, liberal democracy and personal autonomy. This is beneficial for our society, because you become a member of this club and this affects how you will develop internally. The same is the case for the EU, except maybe the security element" (Official from MFA, UNM, personal communication, 5 September, 2014); "small states are lucky that it is the US that became the most influential state in the world, because the US is built on principles that are hopeful for world democracy. […] The internal order of the US is the best" (MP, GD, personal communication, July 8, 2014).

However, value affinity is not merely based on an emotional attachment to the West, but it is also linked with perceived state interests. This argument is based on the idea that complementary value systems lead to complementary interests. Democracy is associated with stability and security, this is why officials have stated that "the world order that the US and the EU promote is fully in the interests of Georgia" (Official from MIA, UNM, personal communication, July 1, 2014) and that the West also cares about civilized neighbors who can take care of themselves (MP from Committee on European Integration, UNM, personal communication, June 19, 2014). Democracy is something which western states are assumed to be promoting for their security: "In the 21st century, you cannot guarantee your peace only by taking care of your borders. Your neighbors should also be stable and democratic. These are the interests of the EU and US" (Official from Ministry of Euro-Atlantic Integration, GD, personal communication, September 2, 2014). Georgian political elites often tend to subscribe to common assumptions of liberal theories of international relations like democratic peace theory: "if we look at political slogans such as a united, free and peaceful Europe, this expresses the perception of security enjoyed by liberal democracies" (Official from Ministry of Defense, UNM, personal communication, July 1, 2014). As this perception excludes the possibility of violence towards other similar states, this excludes war between democratic states (Diplomat to International Organizations, UNM, personal communication, June 23, 2014).

6. Russia as an "other" – incompatible social orders

An identity-based account also offers a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of Russia–Georgia relations. Perceiving itself as part of a greater Europe, Georgia's political class – a group that sometimes acts on behalf of the state – sees Georgia's path as utterly incompatible with the Russian project. First of all, Russia is defined as a successor to the Soviet Union and its self-proclaimed sphere of influence is considered as a danger to Georgia's national security. Believing that Russia is a sui generis phenomenon that cannot disassociate itself from its Eurasianist ideology and imperialist ambitions,[8] they consider their northern neighbor neither European nor attractive in terms of its socio-economic model. As Russian expert Fyodor Lukyanov (2012) observed, "Georgia has sought to create a conceptual alternative to Russia by providing an example of a complete and irreversible break of historical and cultural ties with its powerful neighbor." Georgia's political class believes that Russia offers no compelling vision of a revived Russian sphere of influence, even for its own allies as it already lost the battle for innovation and economic development, and is gradually becoming an "industrial museum." Georgia, some respondents argue, should form partnerships with more progressive countries and should be united to the core area of global development (the West), not to peripheral areas (such as the CIS or post- Soviet space). As this perception still prevails over the sub-consciousness of Georgia's political elites, they believe that Georgia should continue to cooperate with the West, as other alternatives cannot satisfy Georgia's economic and security needs.

This incompatibility with Russia is largely based on the social orders, both real and aspirational, of each country. Many Georgians view the Georgia–Russia conflict as value-based, part of a broader value-based rivalry between the West and Russia. Georgia's choice of European integration inherently implies conflict with Russia. "There is a value conflict between the West and Russia and as we say that we are European, therefore, we also have a value-conflict with Russia" (MP, GD, personal communication, June 8, 2014). But this perception of Russia goes beyond that country's opposition to pro-western foreign policy and that is where social orders come into play. As some respondents claim, it is not that Russia is opposed to pro-western policy but it is against building a western type of state and that is what Georgia is doing (Official from NSC, GD; Deputy Minister, GD, personal communications). Therefore, Russia's internal order is assumed to be shaping its interests, but also shaping Georgia's, because "partnership with a non-democratic, corrupt country that does not share modern values would be disastrous for a small state" (MP, GD, personal communication, July 22, 2014).

Georgia is considered as perceiving security and safety in the same way that the West does and again indicating similar social orders. On the other hand Russia's aggressive foreign policy and domestic order are discussed as intertwined: "Russia's revanchism requires authoritarianism at home. If Russia was democracy, people would question its foreign policy. Russia does not care about anyone's well-being, however, individualism is a basic principle of liberal democracy. Thus it is naturally impossible to have any common interests with Russia" (Diplomat to international organizations, UNM, personal communication, June 23, 2014). Respectively, there is little perceived advantage in cooperating with the Kremlin as the Georgian political class does not believe that there is a deal to be had with Russia. Consequently, cooperation or partnership between Russia and Georgia would be possible if Russia moved towards democracy (MP from Defense and Security Committee GD, personal communication, September 8, 2014). The same idea is developed in the official documents as well including National Security Concept from 2011 (MacFarlane, 2012). "If Russia saw itself as part of the

[8] On various philosophical threads of Eurasianism see: Laruelle, M. (2012). *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

European family, our return to Europe would be much easier. But now Russia tries to create its own space" (Official from NSC, UNM, personal communication, June 20, 2014). "If we talk about political culture, when countries develop the same way, their perceptions of threat and security also resemble each other. Therefore, Georgia's perception of security is similar to the West's. It is the opposite to Russia's, who has the most conflicts with states that are oriented towards development" (Official from Ministry of Defense, UNM, personal communication, July 1, 2014).

Europeanization is in a way "desovietization" for Georgia. This is achieved by distancing the country from post-Soviet groupings (like the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS),[9] the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Customs Union and others) that are heavily dominated by Moscow. Viewing Russia as a successor of the Soviet empire, Georgian political elites view its attempts of reintegration as a threat to national security. In some ways "desovietization" became a nationwide mantra drawing from an identity-based narrative (Kakachia, 2013a). Correspondingly, the recent bipartisan resolution on "Basic Directions of Georgia's Foreign Policy" excludes any "military, political and customs alliance with a state that recognizes Abkhazia and South Ossetia" and also states that Georgia will not join international organizations that in their essence contradict "the principles of the rule of law and supremacy of human rights." This rules out diplomatic relations with Russia or Russia-led organizations in the region unless Russia ceases its occupation of Georgian territories (Civil.ge, 2013, March 7). In fact, in congruence with this position, polls also indicate that whilst the majority of Georgians support good relations with Russia, they are unwilling to get involved in Russia-led integration processes at the expense of Georgia's sovereignty (Navarro, 2013).

Georgia has also sought European belonging in geographical terms. No longer willing to be identified merely as a post-Soviet country or with the Caucasus, a region of instability and fragmentation, Georgian elites preferred to be labeled as a member of the Black Sea community as a way to become affiliated with the rest of Europe (Kulick & Yakobashvili, 2008). Indeed during Saakashvili's presidency, in terms of regional cooperation, the switch of focus from the South Caucasus to the Black Sea region in official documents is one indicator of a trend that has played a major role in Georgia's pro-western drive (Kakhishvili, 2013). As regional cooperation within the wider Black sea area was one of Georgias main foreign policy priorities, Georgian political elites define themselves as belonging to the region in terms of shared values and identify themselves as belonging to Eastern Europe, southern Europe, the Black Sea region, or the Mediterranean rather than the volatile South Caucasus. They argue that the concept of a South Caucasus region is merely a post-colonial legacy and thus it is considered to be an artificial region "created by Tsarist and Soviet Russia for their own geopolitical interests. As the South Caucasus as a sub-region still remains without a proper "regional identity," it "cannot be viewed as a coherent region as Caucasians have never distinguished themselves in this way" (Official from NSC, UNM, personal communication, June 6, 2014). Neither does the post-Soviet space exist in terms of culture and civilization. In this sense, the "region" exists only for outside players (Diplomat from Georgian Mission to EU, UNM, personal communication, June 30, 2014).

7. Conclusion

This paper was based on a theoretical framework that views foreign policy as a reflection of the existence of certain ideas and identities within a society and one in which the process of constructing the "self" vis-à-vis an "other" is an important component of foreign policy formulation. Decision-makers' perception of the compatibility of the ideas and social order of their country and those of external actors tend to impact how state interests are defined and provide guidelines for relevant behavior.

In the context from which Georgia's foreign policy emerged, national identity has been correspondingly constructed in relation to these issues. Georgia's European identity, which has come to hold a dominant position in Georgian political discourse, has gradually emerged throughout its history of constant occupation and division, first as a Christian state in contrast to Georgia's Muslim neighbors and later as European. After disappointment with Orthodox Russia, Georgia continued its quest for a European future through direct relations with the West. In this context, Russia and the Soviet Union were perceived as barriers to this process. Since its declaration of independence, while Georgian foreign policy evolved reactively, direct links with Europe were consistently sought. But it was only after the Rose Revolution that Georgia's pro-western orientation was starkly defined and officially justified with arguments of cultural belonging and through the explicit definition of Russia as an existential threat.

This analysis has shown that the formulation of the national interest and foreign policy of Georgia cannot be discussed without reference to identity and social order preferences within the state. Georgia's pro-western orientation arises partly through the Georgian political elite's idea of the country belonging in Europe by virtue of its history, values and democratic aspirations. The type of social order is the central notion in this linkage. Georgian elites also assume that the West has an interest in Georgian democratization and see a pro-western orientation as a tool for internal development.

Russia is defined as an "other" on the grounds of its different social order and values. Consequently, conflict with Georgia's northern neighbor is seen as a value-based clash that could potentially be alleviated if Russia were to switch to a democratic internal order. Georgia's effort to break away from the post-Soviet space and the Russian sphere of influence is related to its self-perception as a

[9] Georgia was not part of CIS at the beginning, but as a result of civil wars it was forced to join the CIS in late 1993, and early the following year, also to become a member of the CIS's Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). In 1999, however, Georgia quit CSTO and after the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 it quitted CIS.

country striving for democracy and association with the West vis-à-vis Russia's unattractive alternative model.

In sum, an identity-based account offers a better understanding of the construction and application of Georgian foreign policy than a purely material interest-based approach. The notion that Georgia belongs in "the West" provides a certain foundation for Georgia's pro-western orientation and its identity driven foreign policy. Moreover, this view allows us to forecast the future direction of Georgia's foreign policy. However, it should not be forgotten that consideration of Georgia's foreign policy from the identity perspective is fraught with inevitable risks as the country and its identity remains in flux and is therefore prone to change.

Appendix 1. Respondent profiles.

#	Position	Affiliation	Date of interview
1	High-ranking official from Ministry of Reintegration (former)	UNM	30.05.14
2	High-ranking official from Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)	GD	03.06.14
3	MP from Committee on European Integration (former)	UNM	19.06.14
4	High-ranking official from National Security Council (NSC) (former)	UNM	20.06.14
5	High-ranking diplomat to various International Organizations (former)	UNM	23.06.14
6	High-ranking diplomat from Georgian mission to EU (former)	UNM	30.06.14
7	High-ranking official from Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) (former)	UNM	01.07.14
8	High-ranking official from Ministry of Defense (former)	UNM	01.07.14
9	Member of Parliament	GD	08.07.14
10	High-ranking official from Ministry of Euro-Atlantic Integration (former)	UNM	08.07.14
11	High-ranking official from Ministry for Reconciliation and Civic Equality	GD	22.07.14
12	Member of Parliament	GD	22.07.14
13	MP from Committee on European Integration	GD	22.07.14
14	Member of Parliament	GD	22.07.14
15	High-ranking official from PM's Office	GD	30.07.14
16	MP from Committee on European Integration	UNM	27.08.14
17	High-ranking official from Ministry of Euro-Atlantic Integration	GD	02.09.14
18	High-ranking official from Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) (former)	UNM	05.09.14
19	High-ranking official from National Security Council (NSC)	GD	07.09.14
20	MP from Defense and Security Committee	GD	08.09.14

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